



3 Taylor Road, Bracebridge, ON P1L 1S6
1-800-835-7303
Algonquin Park, Almaguin Highlands, Loring-Restoule, Muskoka,
Parry Sound & South Algonquin
www.explorersedge.ca



Nature and Wildlife Photography with iPhone

Photographing nature and wildlife is another exciting area of outdoor photography. This can range from close-ups of flowers and insects, to broader nature scenes, to trying to capture animals and birds in the wild. Smartphones have some limitations (especially for distant wildlife), but you can still get impressive nature shots with the right approach. In this section, we'll discuss techniques for shooting the natural world – both the small details and the larger wildlife – using your iPhone.

Tips for nature (flora) and wildlife (fauna) photography:

- **Get Close and Fill the Frame (for Nature Macro):** One advantage of the iPhone is its ability to focus quite close to subjects. Use this for things like flowers, leaves with dew drops, butterflies, or any interesting texture in nature. Physically move closer to your subject to fill the frame with detail (just be careful not to cast a shadow on it or disturb a creature). On iPhone 12, the minimum focus distance is a few inches; on newer models (13 Pro and later), there's an automatic Macro mode that lets you focus as close as ~2 cm. Take advantage of this to capture sharp close-ups of petals, insects, or textures like bark. When shooting extreme close-ups, even a slight movement can throw off focus, so hold steady; consider bracing your hands or phone against something solid. Tap to focus on the exact spot you want (like the center of a flower or the insect's eye) to ensure that's sharp. A tiny depth of field means backgrounds will naturally blur even without portrait mode, which makes your subject stand out. These close detail shots can be stunning and are great for small business owners in fields like handmade crafts or food – for instance, a close-up of a product with natural textures behind.
- **Use Portrait Mode for Objects/Pets:** If your iPhone supports portrait mode on non-human subjects (iPhone 12 and above do attempt this, and the 12 Pro with LiDAR is even better at it), you can try using Portrait mode on flowers, plants, or even your pet. This can produce a nicely blurred background and a sharp subject. For example, a portrait-mode shot of a flower can look professional with the background completely soft. Keep the same distance guidelines (a couple of feet away, and ensure the background is a reasonable distance behind the subject to get a good blur). Not every object will trigger portrait mode (it sometimes needs to detect a distinct subject and background separation), but experiment. You might find it works on a mushroom on the ground or a

close-up of a cat in the garden. If it does work, you'll get that DSLR-style shallow depth of field look where the subject really pops.

- **Patience with Wildlife:** Photographing animals (birds, squirrels, pets, etc.) can be challenging but rewarding. The key virtue here is patience. Animals don't take direction, so you must be ready and observant. Patience and observation are crucial – watch the animal's behavior and wait for the right moment to capture it. If you're trying to photograph wildlife, move slowly and quietly. Sudden movements will startle most creatures. For birds or mammals, sometimes it's best to find a spot, get your camera ready, and then wait for the wildlife to come into view or return to a spot (for example, birds might return to a feeder or a perch if you remain still). Use continuous shooting or burst to capture fast movements – e.g., a bird taking flight or a dog running. Often, you'll end up with many shots and maybe one golden frame where everything clicks. That's normal for wildlife photography.
- **Know Your Camera's Limits (Use Telephoto Wisely):** Unlike DSLRs with big zoom lenses, the iPhone's reach is limited. If you have an iPhone with a telephoto lens (2× or 3× optical zoom), that should be your go-to for any subject that is far away, like birds on a tree or wildlife at a distance. Use the 2×/3× option rather than pinching to zoom digitally – optical zoom maintains full quality. Digital zoom (beyond the optical) will degrade image quality and result in a pixelated or blurry shot. It's usually better to get closer physically if you can do so safely, or simply accept a wider framing and crop the photo later. For example, if there's a deer in a field and you only have a 1× lens, take the photo as is; later you might crop in a bit, which is effectively the same as digital zoom but gives you more control. If you must capture a subject that's quite far, consider using video – sometimes recording a 4K video and then extracting a frame of the closest view can work (though frame quality will be 8 megapixels or so). But generally, try to photograph wildlife that you can approach reasonably or that isn't tiny in the frame. Tip: You can use binoculars or a monocular in front of your iPhone lens as a makeshift zoom (line up the eyepiece with your phone camera) – it's tricky but can work in a pinch for an id photo of a far animal, though the quality won't be tack sharp.
- **Use Burst and Live Photos for Action:** Wild animals or even pets move unpredictably. Use burst mode to capture multiple frames of a moving subject (like a bird flapping its wings, or a dog jumping). This increases your chances of getting a clear, well-timed shot. Live Photos can also help; if you have a Live Photo of a bird just as it flew, you might scrub through the few frames to find the one where the wings are in a nice position and make that the key photo. Newer iPhones also have the ability to shoot shorter bursts at 10 fps by holding the shutter (older ones used a different method). Check your Camera settings for enabling burst with volume button if you prefer that. Remember, you can always delete the extra burst frames later – it's worth it to get that perfect moment.
- **Leverage Natural Light and Time of Day:** Just like with landscapes, early morning and late afternoon are often great times for wildlife. Not only is the light softer (which is good

for photos), but many animals are more active at these times (dawn and dusk are when you might see birds feeding, deer grazing, etc.). Also, these times give you a better chance of interesting atmosphere – perhaps morning fog (imagine a deer in soft morning fog – magical!), or warm evening light. Midday wildlife shots not only suffer from harsh light, but many animals hide away in shade during the heat of the day. Of course, you'll take what opportunities you can get – just be mindful of light direction with animals too. If you can position yourself with the sun at your back, the animal will be nicely lit. But sometimes a backlit animal (like a silhouette of a bird) can be artistic. For example, you might capture the silhouette of a bird on a branch against a colorful sunset sky. Use the exposure slider to adjust for these creative choices (darken to silhouette, or brighten to reveal the animal's features). Overcast weather can also be advantageous – it lets you shoot all day with even light (great for zoo photography or birds in tree foliage where dapples of sun would be problematic).

- **Capture Behavior and Context:** The best nature and wildlife photos often tell a story or show an interesting behavior. Rather than just a static shot of an animal, try to capture it doing something – a bird catching a bug, a squirrel jumping, a butterfly on a flower drinking nectar, a person's dog tilting its head, etc. Be ready for these moments. Use "anticipation" – if you see a heron poised to strike a fish, keep the camera ready (maybe even shoot a slow-motion video as it might happen very fast). If your goal is a still, burst mode can catch the moment the fish is caught. Similarly, for nature like plants, think about context: a lone flower in a field might look nice, but a photo of that flower with a bee approaching it tells a bigger story of nature. Always be observant and ready – nature can surprise you.
- **Steady Shots for Long Exposure Water:** Earlier we discussed the Live Photo long-exposure trick for waterfalls. In nature photography, this is a creative idea to try whenever you have moving water (waterfalls, streams, ocean waves) or even moving clouds. Mount your iPhone on a tripod or stable surface, ensure Live Photo is on, and snap the scene. Later, apply the Long Exposure effect to get that silky water effect. Because the iPhone merges multiple frames, stationary objects (rocks, trees) will remain sharp, and only moving parts (water) will blur – it's a neat effect that used to require a DSLR and ND filters. This adds a professional touch to waterfall or river shots, making them look like they were taken with dedicated gear. Just remember that the phone still needs to be fairly still during the Live capture for best results, otherwise everything will blur a little.
- **Ethics and Safety:** A quick note – when photographing wildlife, always respect the animals and your own safety. Don't get so close that you disturb the creature or put yourself in danger. Even for that perfect shot, it's not worth stressing an animal or risking a bite. Use common sense; for example, with wild animals, give them space (use that telephoto lens). With plants, avoid trampling other vegetation just to get closer – try to stick to paths. Ethical nature photography ensures the environment stays as you found it.

In summary, nature and wildlife photography with an iPhone is absolutely doable and can produce stunning images. Focus on what the iPhone excels at: close-ups, well-lit scenes, and quick captures of moments. Don't be discouraged by what it can't do (extreme telephoto); instead, work within its strengths. For instance, you might not get a frame-filling shot of a distant eagle, but you can take a beautiful wider shot of the eagle in its environment (like perched on a tree in the landscape). Or shift your attention to approachable wildlife – butterflies, ladybugs, flowers, your own pets – and hone your skills there. The techniques you practice will serve you well if and when you do use a more advanced camera, but you'll be surprised how much you can achieve with just your phone.

To wrap up this section, here are a few **extra tips specific to nature/wildlife**:

- **Perspective:** Don't shoot everything from standing eye level. For small subjects (mushrooms, frogs, flowers), get down to their level – this often results in more intimate and interesting images. Try various angles: from directly above, low side angles, wide shots including habitat, or tight close-ups. Experimenting with perspectives adds depth and interest to your shots .
- **Use Continuous Autofocus (AF):** The iPhone continuously adjusts focus on moving subjects in video and sometimes in photo if you half-press via EarPods or use focus lock wisely. If an animal is moving toward you, you might try capturing it in a short video then extracting a frame, as iPhone video will adjust focus as it moves. This is advanced, but worth noting.
- **Burst for unexpected moments:** It was mentioned, but to reiterate – if something exciting is happening (bird in flight, etc.), hold that shutter and burst. You can delete the 20 bad ones later. It's digital, no cost to overshoot.
- **Leverage the environment:** Sometimes including more of the environment tells a better story than an isolated subject. A fox in the woods with trees around gives context; a close-up of just the fox's face might not convey it's in the wild. Decide what story you want – isolate the subject or show its world – and compose accordingly.